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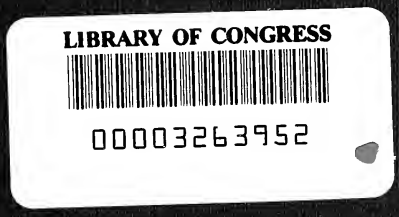

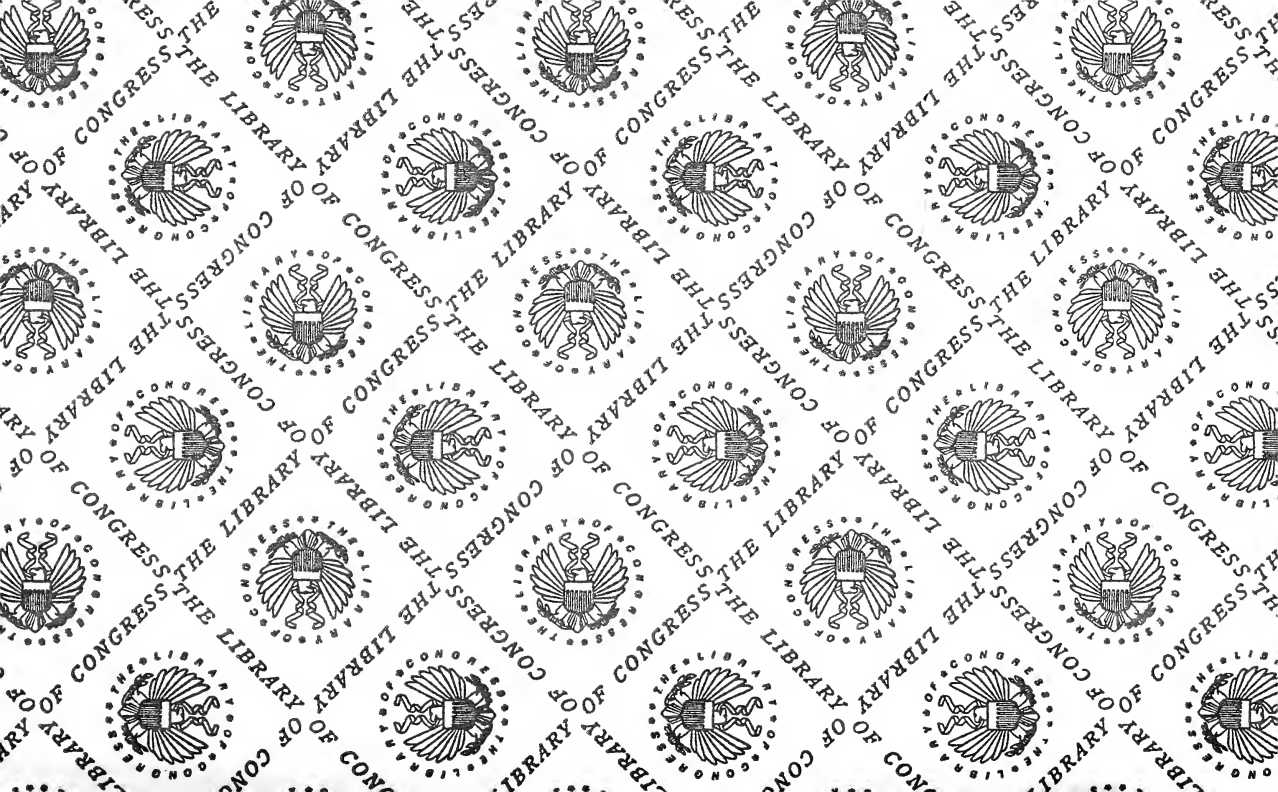
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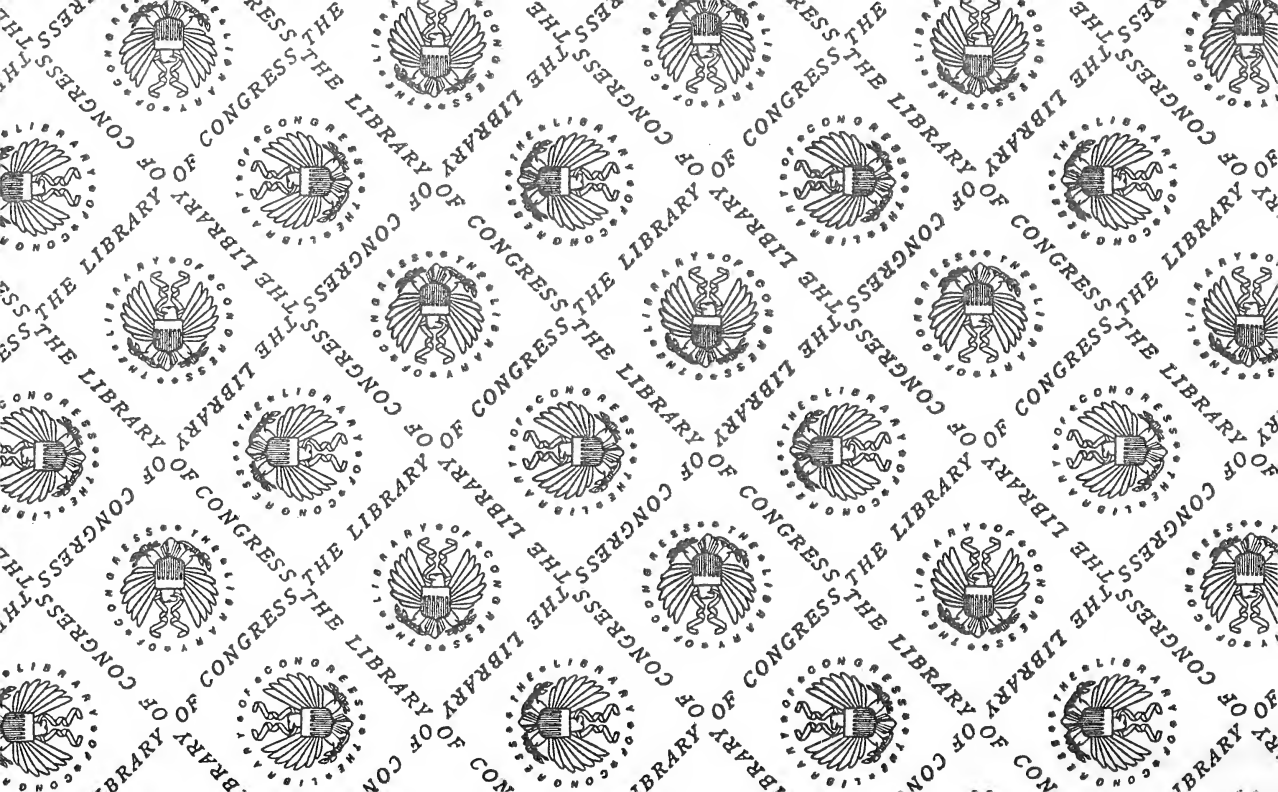
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SONGS OF MY PEOPLE

Songs of My People

CHARLES BERTRAM JOHNSON

THE CORNHILL COMPANY
BOSTON

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SONGS OF MY PEOPLE

SONGS OF MY PEOPLE

LACRIMAE AETHIOPIAE

For Roscoe C. Jamison obit, March 28, 1918.

The world is ever old and new
  As that fair day the Pinta's prow
From out the primal ocean drew
  A world to crown a Dreamer's brow.

New worlds of dream in some far sea
  Of thought await the poet's quest —
Who knows what may discovered be,
  Wide-eyed, sea faring down the West?

So his fair soul, our sable Bard,
  Upon the sea of Darkness deep,
Weighed anchor, sails unfurled, and hard
  Aport, made safe the Harbor sleep.

Bring hither praise or sigh or tear,
  Let all who can a full-blusht rose,
Heap all upon his fair young bier,
  His life half-blown no longer blows.

Too soon is hushed his silver speech,
  The music dies upon the lute,
The cadence falls beyond our reach;
  Too soon the Poet's lips are mute.

I did not know him as you knew,
  Who heard him speak or held his gaze;
He was to me a poet true,
  Whose singing subtly thrilled our ways.

Why reckon what the unlived years
  For his young dreaming soul held store?
A posy must suffice our tears,
  For never shall he sing us more.

O singer of the race my own,
  Full well the tardy praise I know;
Our words before unsaid atone
  Too late to set your heart aglow.

Perhaps when years a redder glow
  Paint soft into the deep'ning day,
We, blind ones now, thenceforth shall know,
  Who once withheld the laurel bay,

Where our green cypress wreaths to lay;
  Tho' song shall have one empty throne,
But he, who sang in twilight gray,
  Shall come full wreathed into his own.

THE DREAMER

Like vast nebulæ spinning into space
Scintillant worlds of light, his fine spun dreams
Are nebulæ of thought; no failure seems
To daunt him nor despair; but calm the face
He shows the world; if once he wept, no trace
Of tears appears; but still about him gleams
With loftiness of soul, a light that streams
Across our meaner paths and sordid place;
Like one who walks in mist or dusk is blurred
He fares among mankind with lofty brow,
And half of what he dreams is true and wise,
Tho' indistinct and dim, like music heard
In sleep; but seldom does our faith allow
The wisdom of his clearer, subtler eyes.

MEMORY

Around each empty nest,
  By subtle memory stirred,
The wind doth keep astir
  A chirping sadness of the bird.

Within each empty heart,
  Kin to the Heart above,
The soul doth keep aflame
  The altar lamp of Love.

SERENITY

The storms that break and sweep about my feet,
The winds that blow and tear, the rains that fall,
Shall not the courage of my soul appall;
I shall be conqueror, tho' sore defeat
O'erwhelm the outbound keels of all my fleet
Of dreams; tho' not one tattered sail, but all
Go down mid sea; with heart serene, I'll greet
The worst or best, the stronger for the squall.

My soul is set amid the storms of life,—
The hurricanes of passion crash and break
And tides of heathen hate sweep o'er our land;
But calm amid the flying ruins of strife,
Or in the leaping flames around the stake
With pierced hands—my faith serene,—I stand!

"THE NEGRO GIRL"

Dark-eyed sun-kisst maid,
Let thy charms entwine,
My fond heart around;
I am slave of thine.
Tell me thy desire:
Laurel wreath or fame,
I am slave of thine,
Thine to praise or blame.

Thou art far above
Evil thought of mine,
I, with holy love,
Worship at thy shrine.

Sun-loved maid, inspire
Him who sings thee fair;
In his heart is love
Worthy of thy care.

NEGRO POETS

Full many lift and sing
Their sweet imagining;
Not yet the Lyric Seer,
The one bard of the throng,
With highest gift of song,
Breaks on our sentient ear.

Not yet the gifted child,
With notes, enraptured wild,
That storm and throng the heart,
To make his rage our own,
Our hearts his lyric throne;
Hard won by cosmic art.

I hear the sad refrain,
Of slavery's sorrow-strain;
The broken half-lispt speech
Of freedom's twilit hour;
The greater growing reach
Of larger latent power.

Here and there a growing note
Swells from a conscious throat;
Thrilled with a message fraught

The pregnant hour is near;
We wait our Lyric Seer,
By whom our wills are caught.

Who makes our cause and wrong
The motif of his song;
Who sings our racial good,
Bestows us honor's place,
The cosmic brotherhood
Of genius — not of race.

Blind Homer, Greek or Jew,
Of Fame's immortal few
Would still be deathless born;
Frail Dunbar, black or white,
In Fame's eternal light,
Would shine a Star of Morn.

An unhorizoned range,
Our hour of doubt and change,
Gives song a nightless day.
Whose pen with pregnant mirth
Will give our longings birth,
And point our souls the Way?

SONG

The year has leased to June;
Twilight and the moon,
Every gift and boon
In the sphere of eye and ear,
In the reach of touch and speech.
Lilac sweetness of the wood,
The clover-scented lea,
Noisy with the bee;
Rain strings, whence the wind,
The old harpist by the sea,
Lures sweet melody.

In the air, everywhere
Breathes a vocal prayer;
Ye who fret and strive
In your self-filled hive,
Come with me, hear and see,
Life in every tree.
The Master comes along,
Thousands round him throng,
Dare the current stem
You may touch His garment's hem.

A RAIN SONG

Chill the rain falls, chill!
Dull gray the world; the vale
Rain-swept; wind-swept the hill;
"But gloom and doubt prevail,"
My heart breaks forth to say.

Ere thus its sorrow note,
"Cheer up! Cheer up! to-day!
To-morrow is to be,"
Babbled from a joyous throat,
A robin's in a mist-gray tree.

Then off to keep a tryst —
He preened his drabbled cloak, —
Doughty little optimist! —
As if in answer, broke
The sunlight thru that oak.

THE FOUND STAR

I stood in the door of Dawn, —
  My room still deep with the night;
The ache in my heart was gone,
  Somewhere in the heavens, a light. —

My star was pulsing to me;
  I searched thru the wide sky-room;
The cry of my heart to see
  My star in the hour of gloom.

A thrill in my heart did run, —
  A slender silvering ray, —
Out in the world the Sun,
  Deep in my room the Day.

NOW AND THEN

" All life is built from song "
  In youth's young morn I sang;
And from a top-near hill
  The echo broke and rang.

The years with pinions swift
  To youth's high noon made flight,
" All life is built from song "
  I sang amid the fight.

To life's sun-setting years,
  My feet have come — Alas!
And through its hopes and fears
  Again I shall not pass.

The lusty song my youth
  With high-heart ardor sang
Is but a tinkling sound —
  A cymbal's empty clang.

And now I sing, my Dear,
  With wisdom's wiser heart,
" All life is built from love,
  And song is but a part."

THE MANTLE OF DUNBAR

Master let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.—II Kings.

O Master Seer! O Singer sweet
Of lyrics of the lowly race,
I kneel in worship at thy feet
With songs divine enraptured face;
O Master Bard, who looked on me,
From thy dim-distant height,
Soft-kindly eye, fain would I be
With nearer knee thy purer light.

But nine fleet years agone, I read
The major chords in minor tone,
And, nun-like, since, with rapt-bowed head,
I've hearkened to thy voice alone;
I've watched, like I have waited Spring
To note the first shy bird's return,
Each song of joy and love outpouring
The quick fires on my soul would burn.

Somewhar, I don't ric-lec' de place,
I heard dem words you sung, des plain,
As we is talkin' — face to face;
Fuh sho'! 'twas 'roun' ouah fiahside chain,

But was you there when dey was said?
Can't recommember you bein' there;
Yit 'n' still your face's mos' familyer;
I'se seed you sho', but can't place whare.

Oh! yes, you tol' dem Dixie tales,
'N' made us young'n's cry a-laffin'
Lak we was fit to kill ouahseff;
'N' then you made us cryin' sad
Wid dat story 'bout Lucy's deff;
An' you's de one what sung so sweet
All dem chunes of Christmas time;
De banjo's voice an' shufflin' feet.

I 'member you could change your voice,
Tell we would think that you had gone,
An' some one else was in your cheer
Some one dead way 'fore you was bohn;
You techt, so light an' tender like,
The chords of laughter, love and life,
We clear forgot old keer an' grief
Was tryin' hard to stir up strife.

O High Priest of the inner shrine,
Where Song's High Muse enthroned in state
Receives her own of lofty brow divine,
How do I mourn thy early fate!
Thou wast the voice of my own soul,

My songs arose from thy full heart;
Since thou before me reached the goal,
Will then the springs of song depart?

Too soon, ah, soon! before the harvest moon
Beneath the cycle falls the grain;
Too soon, ah soon! the lyric morn is noon,
And swift declined is dust adown the lane;
Too soon, ah soon, no mo' de cabin's chune
With lyric laughter breaks de night!
Too soon, ah soon! no mo' de banjo's tune
Will stir ouah feet with fon' delight.

O Master Bard! with you agone
Who'll stir with mighty voice the Race?
Where, in the ranks of Song's sweet sons
Is one to fill thy lofty place?
Oh aching void of voiceless song!
Oh sunset hour ere morn is sped!
On crag and peak a flashing star
And Song's bright day is lowering red.

Oh might I dare that prophet-like!
As one in soul possessed and rapt,
Who knew thee heart and soul alike,
And fought thy cause though oft entrapt
To hear thee damned with bitter word.
Until my very heart would burn —
Blind ignorant ones that knew not thee,
Condemning what they could not learn.

Often the impotent tears of wrath
Flowed down my face suffused and red,
All helpless with a voice too weak
To strike their senseless chatter dead
Forever so they could not speak!
O Master Bard! O Lyric Soul!
When in death's whirlwind caught,
Thy fiery wheels beyond me roll,
Let thy sweet Spirit that hast me taught
Vouchsafe me double portion of its gold,
And loose on me the mantle of thy thought.

ODE TO BOOKER WASHINGTON

God called from out the dark
The primal dawn of day;
On the waters cold and stark
His spirit held the sway.
Day and night and firmament,
Earth, seas and grass and seed,
Sun, moon and stars, were sent,
As time foreshadowed need.
So from the seas life multiplied
Till air and earth were full supplied.

And then from out the soulless clay,
God made, of all creation's day,
His masterpiece, a man inbreathed
With God's own soul, crown-wreathed
With sun and star and day and night,
And change of seasons in their flight;
Then over Eden's garden placed
By love to rule her fairest sod,
The man was underking to God,
And under God's immortal law.
With mate for every kind, God saw
Him, lone, unmated; nor his kind
Among Creation's host, and mind

Of God was wrapt in vision's thought,
Then on the man a deep sleep wrought,
And from his side a true rib tore,
And woman made — man's mate and more.

And they were happy, till their sin
Against the law sent man and wife
From Eden's peace to world-wide strife.
For Eden's loss God gave return:
Thus to the erring creatures said,
" The earth's thy home, therein shall earn
In sweat of brow thy daily bread."
O precious gift!
The soil, man's mother-friend,
Doth still uplift!
The best God gave at Eden's end,
The first great breast that nursed man's youth,
The secret holds of God's creative Truth.

The world moved on
To some far-reaching plan;
Great issues rose,
God met them with a man;
In every age of crucial change,
The world had need of supermen:
Anointed ones, with sun-crowned range:

Meek Moses, step by step, faith-led
From Egypt's osiered fen,

Unscathed by subtle lure,
Mind, heart and conscience pure,
With racial entity secure,
Was then God sent to learn,
Out under Midian sky,
Upon life's vital turn,
God keeps a sleepless eye.

Time sped, and then,
Earth steeped in sin,
A Christ from God,
God come to earth
To give men's souls rebirth;
Again from Dark God called the Light,
The Day began where ended Night.
A more abundant ray
Poured down upon the way;
Truth set her frontiers far
Beyond the utmost distant star.

The world moved on
To newer dawn;
The needs today
Unfold the way;
God fits into the breech
A Lincoln, by no pattern wrought, —
God is not left to one old plan,
But ever has new modes of thought,
And for each issue molds the man.

So from the virgin new-world clay,
A freeman made to make men free;
God's own design is still God's way,
And freedom grows through liberty.

And time wheeled flight
Through day and night,
And then our leader saw the way,
Virginia's second Washington —
With Knowledge that her soil bore one,
From new-world loam and old-world clay
God wrought this superman;
He added to the Sax alloy
The patience of the African.

Out of what burning tree
God spoke unto his soul?
" True toil must set thy people free."
The soil that gave man's soul rebirth,
Whatever other source was worth,
Has been, is now, his mother-friend.

Tuskegee's clear idea
Assures the race a panacea;
Washington's wizardry —
In words and deeds anent
The Negro's highest needs:
A hand full-skilled is tool
Keen-edged — has built a monument:
Trade's world-unrivalled school.

The Prophet's word is clear:
No vision or a seer,
The people perish and
Deep night is near.
Great vision with great faith,
A man may talk with God,
'Tis soul illuminates the clod;
Fresh from Faith's Sinaid peak,
Men, wisdom's message speak.

No life, however great,
Outscales the breath of hate,
Down in the valley 'mid the crowd
Are lesser men
Without the vision's ken,
Heard not the Voice, saw but the cloud,
So thus their doubt and sin.
Too great with God to prate with men,
Great Washington spoke clear and true,
His faith touched Heaven's very Son,
His love connected me and you,
So he, and you and I, and God, and Christ are
One.

A LARGER LIFE

Give me a heart made brave and strong,
A life lived sweet in sorrow's hour,
A living Faith serene in song,
And noble love's diviner power;
Let smiles break swift on frown or tears,
And peace be happy dove in strife;
I have but once to live my years,
'T were good I live a larger life.

Give me sweet faith in other men;
My life is stronger when I trust;
I wish to love them, tho' they sin,
And help them live, because I must.
My life is bound at every turn
In common interest with the good
Of other lives; and tho' I yearn
For trust I'll give the trust I should.

I wish to grow in mind and heart,
To live each day on thought's high plain—
Full conscious of life's nobler part—
Full conscious of life's highest gain;
So live today tomorrow's sun
Will rise in glory's crown arrayed,
Upon no duty left undone,
Or sacrifice I should have made.

Each day is link in life's long chain,
And weak or strong as we shall live;
The whole's not stronger 'neath the strain,
Than strength the weakest link can give,
Each day I'll live as tho' my last,
As tho' before me was unrolled
The future, present and the past—
My whole life's good upon a scroll.

And writ in gold my days of good,
Tho' blank the leaves of idle years,
I oft may read in solitude
How much was wrought by contrite fears —
How much by sincere sympathies—
The crust I shared, the trust I gave,
The hope inspired—felicities
That made a sad heart light and brave.

I shall not live a mussel-shell;
My heart shut fast against the world;
Nor live where others can not dwell,
Ensphered too high above the whirl,
And busy life of men who toil;
But close where break the cries of strife—
Some lower plain anear the soil—
I'll live out full a larger life.

TO AN OAK

O Oak! long years the stress of storm and wind
Has made thy limbs exult in growing thew;
And deeper, surer in the earth descend
The thousand tendrils that were strengthening
you;
With best of sun and song and rain and dew
High on the hill thy strength, tho' storm and wind
Oft did thy tender thewless youth unbend;
But greater thou in limb and power grew.
O mighty oak! with faith serene and sure,
Impart to me the secret of thy girth,
Invest me master of thy patient will;
That through the coming years I may endure,
And deeper rooted in the fields of earth,
At last, as thou, be sovereign of a hill.

SERENADE: A RESPONSE

I set in de window, oh, love, so sweet,
  Whah de moon streams lak a silveh sea,
Yo' guitah thrills to ma heart's wile beat,
  De music steals lak a dream on me—
Lak a dream o' love, so sweet an' true
  De birds croon sof' in dey eave-hid nes'.
De crickets chirp in de grass an' dew
  Since de sun sunk down in de rosi'd Wes'.

You's there, sweet one, in de dusk an' de dahk,
  Yo' song streams bright, lak an' evenin' light,
When de fields throb wile wid de lahk.
  O minstrel prince! I heah yo sweet song,
Stealin' lak morn to ma vine-hid bower,
De music 'n' rapchure 'n' love in de throng,
  Des stream on my heart wid magic power.

Sing on, sweet prince, I bid you sing,
  Strack out de music, rich an' puoh
Lak de honey-drippin' song in spring,
  When de daisies an' roses blow.
Sing on, tell de moonlight in yo' song
  Melts lak twilight into day—
Whatever you sing, ef sweet an' long,
  Ma heart rewards to hearken alway.

THE CUP OF KNOWLEDGE

They brought me, tempting-red, Life's richest
wine,
The mad thirst four hundred years did create,
My soul was maddened with desire to sate,
At one draught, deep-drawn, vital and divine;
I lifted with passionate haste and nigh,
The Cup of Knowledge to my famished lips,
Like hungry flames unchecked in stubble dry,
Athrough my veins red riot to the tips.
The æons that my soul, like smothered flames,
Burned with fierce ardor wild and was restrained,
My soul in silence cherished mighty aims,
And longed to tread in fields then unattained;
At last enfreed I stood in manhood's peace
Full conscious of my soul's divine release.

A LITTLE CABIN

Des a little cabin
Big ernuff fur two,
Des awaitin', honey,
Cozy fixt fur you;
Down dah by de road,
Not ve'y far from town,
Waitin' fur de missis,
When she's ready to come down.

Des a little cabin,
An' er acre o' groun'
Vines agrowin' on it,
Fruit trees all aroun',
Hollyhawks abloomin'
In de gyahden plot —
Honey, would you like to
Own dat little spot?

Make dat little cabin
Cheery, clean an' bright,
With an' angel in it
Like a ray of light?
Make dat little palace
Somethin' fine an' gran',
Make it like an Eden,
Fur a lonely man?

Des you listen, Honey,
While I 'splain it all,
How some lady's go'nter
Boss dat little hall;
Des you take my han'
Dat's de way it's writ,
Des you take my heart,
Dat's de deed to it.

MAKING FRIENDS WITH BABY

I came upon him first chance he was awake,
Still in his cradle, calm as a windless lake;
A sunbeam, thread-like, played over his face.
To prove him my friendship his fears to displace,
I tickled his chin — now think you he smiled?
Well, no! His eyes gleamed with startled look wild,
His lips curled warningly — primped up to cry,
A tear started, fawn-like, flashed in his eye;
I whistled and cooed and prattled baby-speech,
Made queer faces, grimaces quite in the reach
Of his little round pudgy ball of a fist,
All doubled up hard at the end of his wrist;
I stuck out my chin quite pointed and near.
Ere 'ware of his intent, he landed right here
(On my nose.) So quick his blow, so funny the end,
We both laughed out — that made him my friend.

THE ANSWER

What I question of night and the day,
The stars will not answer,
The winds will not say;
What I question the brook and the dell,
The waves only murmur,
The trees will not tell.

So I wander and question them still;
All unanswered my cry
Comes back from the hill,
Where are the flowers, the birds and bees,
The winds that rippled and romped
Through the wheat and the trees?

Where are the mornings the sun made glad,
Full with his brimming face?
Why all today so sad?
Only the leaves reply, and over her bed
The night-wind rose and bade:
Requiem sung for the dead.

SO MUCH

So much of love I need,
  And tender passioned care,
Of human fault and greed
  To make me unaware.

So much of love I owe,
  That ere my life be done,
How shall I keep His will
  To owe not any one?

HUMOR

We have fashioned laughter
Out of tears and pain,
But the moment after,
Pain and tears again.

SPRING 1917

My ear aground
I hear a sound
  Far off!

At last comes spring!
No robins fling
  Aloft

The old-new tale
To hill and vale;
In factory, mart
And war-wrought art,
My people throng
With northward song.

ON HEARING A ROBIN AT EARLY DAWN

Whether skies be blue or dusk,
Thy matins pierce the twilight grey;
In the sleep-encumbered world
Thou dost devotions pay.
Clean-washed with fresh-born wind,
Thy notes impulsive throng,
And at the day's beginning task,
Thou startest it with song.

SPRING

I look beyond my casement where, the snow,
The last March wind in hedge and fence had piled;
A wraith of winter days in faint wind-row,
Lies white and cold, I hear soft waters wild
By warm winds stirred; a knee-deep's call and plain
From yonder marsh or pond breaks on my ear,
But surer faith, O Heart! adown the lane
A blue-throat's slender-carolled notes, I hear
Of Spring's return. I throw off pain and doubt
With that slim warbled lay; back to my heart
The tides of song return; within, without,
In tree or bush or marsh or pond, with swelling start,
O Spring! the children of thy fancy free
Unloose the magic of thy minstrelsy.

MY PEOPLE

My people laugh and sing,
  And dance to death,—
None imagining
  The heartbreak under breath.

IN MARCH

The last chill wind brought snow and ice and sleet;
Like Christmas trees, a dawn from Christmas
night,
The forests were a wraith of silvern white;
At morn the sun burst full with glimmering heat,
The south wind waft across the greening wheat,
A robin's note to cheer my heart's dim night;
Borne back to answer him, my soul's first flight,
This tribute to his vernal song's high beat:
"O High of heart! divinest spirit's form
Didst thou from Hope's high minaret foresee
Wild March with sheeted icy hands of storm
Would wake the trees and set the sap life free?
The faith of thy frail song insistent, clear,
Tho' faltering notes, hath made the day less
drear."

SEPTEMBER

The bumble-bee, too full with sweets,
Falls from the flower and futile beats
The heavy air with swooning wings, —
The while a drowsy song he sings.

BREAKFAST TIME

When de dishes rattle,
Like a passel o' cattle,
Tumblin' out o' bed
Heels plum over head,
Scramblin' to de table
Fas' as dey is able.

When dey's somethin' t' eat,
Chillen can't be beat
Skinnin' in dey clo'es,
Washin' mouf an' nose,
Scrougin' to dey places
With dey half-dry faces.

Rastus, see yo' face:
It's a plum disgrace,
You jus' smeared it worse
Than it were at firs',
Now, you git dat pan
'N' wash dat face ag'an.

Blessin' words too slow,
Dey is anxious, sho,
Rattlin' forks an' knives —
Mercy sakes alives!
Fur to eat yo' bite
Can't you wait a mite?

ARBOR SINGING

Walls too crampy an' too narrer,
W'y, you can't unloose yo' seff,
Speshly if you lack yo' singin',
Sweet ernuff to take yo' breff;
Dey ain't no place can beat it —
Church er chapel, barrin' none,
Lack an' arbeh in de valley,
Whah de ol' time singin's done.

Let de win' be sof'ly sighin'
Thoo de leaves above yo' haid,
An' de brook a babblin' lowly,
Whah de willers make a shade;
Let de crickets be a muhmuhrin'
In de cloveh damp wid dew,
An' all de choirs of nacher
Be a jinin' in wid you.

Den let an' ol' time preacheh,
Dat knows de Scripsheh kneel
Takin' up de cross in pr'ar,—
If you anxious fur to feel,
Lack you's high on Zion's hill,
Way away from pain an' keer,
You jus' listen an' keep still,
Fur you's cert'ly gwine to hear.

How de keers an' ills an' aches
'Pear to lif' dey wings an' fly,
An' visions of de fucher
Is a flitterin' foh yo' eye;
It seems to me dat nacher
Is frien'lier if you's near,
'N' de music of de singin'
Jus' drives away yo' fear.

If you want to heah de golden
Gates of heben swing ajar,
Jus' let de congregation kneel,
An' sof'ly sing in pr'ar.
De singin' seems to melt 'n' rise
In de sweetes' liquid choon,
Yo' keers an' aches an' sorrer
Is boun' to lebe you soon.

Ain't no tonic dat can heal
All de ills dat shorten breath,
Ain't no balm discivered yit
Dat kin draw de sting of death,
But if you wants a moment
Free o' ills an' pains an' care,
Jus' you kneel beneaf an' arbeh,
An' sof'ly sing in prayer.

De place 'n' singin' jus' ain't all,
Dat sets yo' heart abeat,
But de sof'ly cadenced fall
Of Jenny's voice so sweet;

'Cause you knows she's happy,
When you stood up askin' pr'ar,
You's made a start toward heben,
An' she wants to meet you there.

You's been a feller sort o' ruff,
Lack boys mos' allways be,
At de core yo' heart is soun',
You ain't certain dat it's free,
Now you's thinkin' dat it's time,
Fur His grace to have its turn,
You's gwine to 'cept His mercy,
If 'twill knit yo' soul an' her'n.

SINGING AT AMEN CHURCH

They's somethin' sort o' holy
Goes abeatin' thru my heart,
Tho I's feelin' blue an' po'ly,
I can sense the joy-rush start;
They's a warm flash stealin', too,
From my feet up to my hair, —
It's Sunday, an' they's singin',
Like they's sendin' up a prayer, —

In the church across the street,
Now, the buildin's nothin' smart,
Where the cullud folkses meet,
They's got 'ligion of the heart;
An', somehow, in the singin',
The notes keep pourin' out,
An' yo' soul, it gits to ringin'
Tell you's boun' to gin a shout.

Co'se, dey 'ligion ain't no better,
'Cause dey likes to sing 'n' shout it;
But I ruther 'joys the kind,
When you makes to do about it.
I heerd a brotheh tellin',
Dat he's livin' in the way,
He 'spects the Lawd to fin' 'em
On the blessed Jedgmen' Day.

It 'curs to me dat form an' style
  Ain't squenched out all the fiah,
An' the singin' in dat church
  Is de kind in Heben's quiah.
I set here lis'nin' to 'em,
  Tell, thinks I, me it won't supprise,
Dey'll sho be shoutin', honey,
  Wid dat singin' in the skies.

SPRING IN CALLAO

Is de grass a growin' up
Kind o' 'umble here an' there —
Patch o' green amid de grey
In de warm an' sunny air?
Are de old heads settin' roun'
Stretchin' happy in de sun?
Den de spring is sholy come,
An' de wintertime is done.

Are de boys a playin' keeps
Gaily in de dryin' street,
Ol' foks gazin' wis'ful on,
Seein' who is gwine to beat?
Tho de robins whistles peart,
But de shoest sign I know,
When de kids are playin' keeps,
Dat de spring is at de doah.

Are ol' comrades swoppin' tales
'Bout de wars dey's fit an' fit?
Does de town liar keep on tap
Bigger tales than Twain has writ?
An' it's hoss shoe pitchin' time;
Sandy can't be beat, I know,
Pshaw! pitchin' 'gin dat feller,
You ain't gwine to stan' no sho'.

Chillen comin' down de street,
When de hours in school is done,
Make de welkin shout an' ring
With dey innercence an' fun.
Gee! my heart yearns, 'cause I know,
When de blue bird 'mence to sing,
Dat de kids are playin' keeps,
An' in Callao it's spring.

Like to be back there in spring,
Take de path my feet bes' know,
An' slip off adown de track,
Where de first spring flowers grow;
Stroll off into field an' wood,
There where de creek is streamin';
Mercy! am I wake or sleep?
Sho! I must be dreamin'.

BR'ER RABBIT'S CHRISTMAS TRICK

Daddy knows a whole lot o' tales;
  An' some would make you laff yohseff
Ontell yoh sides would ache an' split,
  An' yoh lungs were clear out o' breff.
He tol' de very funniest tale
  'Bout how Br'er Rabbit's tail was los'.
An' how dat wise ol' Misteh Fox
  Become Br'er Rabbit's ridin' hoss.

He tol' how Br'er Wolf an' Br'er Bah
  Once give a great big Chris'mus tree,
Away down in Possum Holler,
  Ast all de critters dah to be;
An' Br'er Rabbit was de very man
  To write de names an' 'range each thing
Upon de critters' Chris'mus tree,
  De way it orter hang an' swing.

Den de critter brung dey presents,
  An' Br'er Rabbit, hard at work,
Was writin' names an' hangin' gifts
  As busy as a 'lectshun clerk.
All day de critters fotched an' brung,
  De very mos' dat dey could tote,
An' Br'er Rabbit wropt an' hung,
  An' Br'er Rabbit writ an' wrote.

When de tree an' ev'rything was done,
De Chris'mus bells began to chime,
From dell an' creek an' hole an' nes'
De critters came on C. P. time.
At de time appinted, Br'er Bah
Called out de presents from de tree,
An' Br'er Wolf he carried 'em roun',
As quickly as his eyes could see.

De very first — a cabbage fine
Was enscribed wid Br'er Rabbit's name;
De next, a pound o' butter, too,
How odd! was markt de very same;
An' all de gif's Br'er Bah took down,
I sho' declah, upon my life,
Was for Br'er Rabbit an' his kin,
Or else was for Br'er Rabbit's wife.

At first de critters tried to grin,
An' laff it off as bein' fun;
But when Br'er Rabbit an' his kin
Got all de presents eb'ry one —
Dem smilin' looks begun to fade,
De feelin's sho' were high an' free;
Br'er Lynx he cut a grapevine rope
To lynch 'im on dat Chris'mus tree.

Dey formed a mob an' made a plan;
An' Br'er Lynx, who made de start,
Dey chosen leader of de ban'.
An' each one swo' to do his part;

Dey searched de woods an' lan' all thoo;
  But Br'er Rabbit showed his wit
Him, his wife an' kin an' — presents!
  Were nowheres to be found in it.

CALLED TO PREACH

I's got 'ligion — yes 'ndeed,
Knows I's got it sho,
My clothes done change, an' now
Dey's white as Chris'mas snow;
Dese ain't rags I's wearin',
Dis is a Prince Albert coat,
When I got my 'ligion
Jedge Gray gimme dis to tote.

Ain't it black an' slick?
Got two tails behin',
Jus' de very kin' o' trick
Wishin' dat was mine.
Don't it hang down fine?
Spec's I'll turn out preacher,
A great big one like Sturgeon,
Or sich er one like Beecher.

I'se been called to preach,
Ca'se my 'ligion has been tried,
Comin' thoo a fiel' las' night,
What you reckon dat I spied?
A great big striped wateh millun,
No moon, no chance gittin' caught,
Shet my eyes an' went straight on,
Like a preacher ought.

Went pas' farmer Jones' gate,
Spied a pullet slick an' fine,
Out a pickin' kind o' late,
Had to say a Scripsher line
To keep myseff from sin,
My han's tuck a cur'us feelin',
Like dey's takin' somethin' in,
Barely kep's myseff f'om stealin'.

But dat chicken knew
I'd been called to preach,
When I wus a sinneh,
He wouldn' sot dah in my reach;
Dey'd seem to know my step,
An' begin to run an' squawk,
An' take out fur de house
Jus' like dey's seen a hawk.

Got home feelin' blue an' sick,
Mammy'd set right nigh
A jemmy john ha'f full, —
De fines' ol' Kaintucky rye;
E't my suppeh, didn' tech a drap,
Settin' right there in my reach,
Dat's de reason why I knows,
I's been lectioneer'd to preach.

HER CHRISTMAS GIFT

Ketched Mis' Lucy's Chris'mas gif'!
G'way man! Ef I'd tell you,
Folks when dey pass would smile,
Bekaze dey'd know it too.
Now you nee'n' to promise,
Ner cross yo' breast — no art
Is gwine to git de secret
Locked up in my heart.

'Cause she made me promise
On oath I wouldn' tell;
But she sho' looked putty,
An' huh lips wus sweet — Well!
I s'pose I nee'n' to hint,
But little more'n dis,
Fur you know already,
Dat it was a kiss.

An' I made huh promise,
Befoh nex' Chris'mas Day,
Dat she'd say de words
I'd be askin' huh to say,
I want de days to hurry,
De weeks to fly way swif',
Fur I's gwine to git nex' year,
A biggeh Chris'mas gif'.

DREAMIN'

I set a dreamin' boy wus here,
Jus' like befoh he mahched erway;
He made the ol' pianner ring,
Gran' like the way he use to play.

So real it seem to 'pear to me,
I heered 'im as he use to do,
Countin' dem dots — " one, two, three "
Till, thinks I, maybe it is true.

Jus' 's I's fixin' to go an' see,
I seed 'im in de do' so still,
Smilin', like 'e use to smile at me,
When a chile 'e use to be so ill.

My heart wus flutt'rin' in my mouf,
Couldn' b'leeve my eyes er whut it seem,
I riz to take 'im in my hungry arms,
'N' 'en I woke 'twus only jus' a dream.

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